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A Plot Reported In Poland

Lech Walesa was recently targeted for an assassination that would have been blamed on the CIA, it is reported. The plot failed because the convicted murderer picked by Polish State Security reneged at the last moment, according to his taped confession.

This account involving the founder of the banned Solidarity trade union, Poland's most popular leader, unfolded in a confession by the would-be assassin, whose name is Szczepanski, May 9 in Walesa's Gdansk apartment. Walesa informed the police and gave them the tape of the confession. Police then produced Szczepanski in a jail cell to make a televised denial of what he had told Walesa.

The plot to kill the embodiment of Polish nationalism coincides with jail terms for two of Walesa's closest Solidarity partners and intellectual leader Adam Michnik. It is part of state-ordered violence that has escalated since Solidarity was outlawed. Highest levels of the Roman Catholic Church have been targeted in assaults not reported in the West and ignored by a Reagan administration preoccupied with the forthcoming Geneva summit.

The conspiracy against Walesa, as recounted by Szczepanski, covered two years starting in June 1983, just after Walesa met Pope John Paul II. Nothing could alarm the Soviet-controlled regime more than collaboration between Poland's two foremost nationalists.

Szczepanski had been jailed 11 years for homicide in Rawicz, a small town in northern Poland. He was contacted by a man he presumed to be a State Security agent and told to ask for parole to visit his sick wife. He did so, and it was granted.

The presumed agent met him at the train station in Rawicz, and a long indoctrination began. No final objective was revealed beyond promised release from jail if he obeyed orders. Twice more Szczepanski was told to ask for parole, and each time he got it, the last on Oct. 16, 1984, for six months.

Setting the stage for what followed, the presumed security agent who had become his mentor told him to feign a suicide attempt over a family tragedy. That had the desired effect. Szczepanski was sent to a sanitarium as a mental case (a label government spokesman Jerzy Urban applied to Szczepanski the day he was accused by Walesa).

When released from the psychiatric hospital in late April, Szczepanski received final instructions for the assassination of Walesa. He was told he would receive a U.S.-made pistol and a large sum of dollars and was promised a passport and visa to the country of his choice. On April 30, he would be picked up by a marked Fiat and driven to a place where he would find Walesa.

Szczepanski told Walesa his instructions were to shoot him "in the head or in the stomach," drop his gun, allow himself to be arrested and admit his crime. He would tell police that CIA officers in the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw had bribed him (recalling Soviet charges that the CIA shot the pope). He would then be free to go abroad.

At that point, Szczepanski called a halt to the dirty business and went to Walesa. Since then, Walesa has told leading churchmen (including Bishop Tadeusz Goclowski of Gdansk) that although the plot Szczepanski related to him is not susceptible to positive proof, he personally believes it.

New information reaching the United States from Catholic clerics sets a pattern of anti-church outrages that comport with the plot against Walesa. Bishop Goclowski was physically attacked at the very doors of his church by a burly security agent pretending to be drunk. An eyewitness told us he saw the agent's identification papers, grabbed from him by an angry crowd as he fled.

In Wroclaw, the personal automobile of newly invested Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz was vandalized and burned in a daylight attack that had earmarks of a State Security "job."

In a separate incident, a Soviet-made car crashed through the main door of Wroclaw's Cathedral of St. John and traveled down the nave almost to the altar. The driver was arrested, judged "temporarily insane" and released.

U.S. officials monitoring these events fear they foreshadow an even harsher political crackdown ordered by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. But this is ignored by a White House intent on doing nothing to spoil the Reagan-Gorbachev summit.

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